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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1996-1997

Integrated Management Information System project

Fifth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the eighth progress report of the Secretary-General on the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) project, contained in document A/C.5/51/23. During the course of its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management and with other representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information.

2. The Advisory Committee welcomes the Secretary-General's efforts to keep Member States informed of the progress in the implementation of the IMIS project. At the same time, the Advisory Committee points out that the report of the Secretary-General would have been more transparent and useful had it contained information on budget performance, personnel and other administrative matters related to IMIS, and a forecast of future requirements, especially in the light of the numerous delays and difficulties reflected in the Secretary-General's report. Information is also necessary on the number and composition of staff working on the project, the vacancy situation in the IMIS team and its impact on the project, contractual status of IMIS staff and redeployment of staff to IMIS. The Advisory Committee trusts that the Secretary-General's next progress report on IMIS will include such information.

3. With regard to resource requirements for the project, the representatives of the Secretary-General confirmed, upon inquiry, the understanding of the Advisory Committee that there is no request for additional resources in the eighth progress report. The Advisory Committee was also informed that the total expenditure for IMIS is estimated at $76 million, inclusive of maintenance costs during the bienniums 1994-1995 and 1996-1997.

4. As indicated in paragraph 2 of and in the annex to document A/C.5/51/23, Release 1 of the IMIS system, comprising personnel applications, and Release 2, personnel entitlements, were successfully installed at Headquarters in September 1993 and April 1995, respectively, while Release 3, financial and support services applications, was mostly completed and implemented at Headquarters in April 1996. The Advisory Committee notes that the implementation of Release 3, which is by far the largest and most complex of the system, encountered significant difficulties which required a temporary transfer of resources from Release 4, payroll, personal insurance management and time and attendance proceeds. On inquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that although difficulties had resulted in delays in the deployment of the system to offices away from Headquarters and in the implementation of Release 4, efforts were being taken to compensate for the delays and to complete the installation of IMIS as originally planned. The annex to the Secretary-General's report provides an updated status of the IMIS project.

5. Part III (paras. 15-40) of the Secretary-General's report contains information on Release 3. The Advisory Committee shares the view of the Secretary-General that it is too early to proceed to a detailed assessment of this release owing to its complexity and to the adjustments that are still under way. The Advisory Committee welcomes the efforts to identify and overcome the implementation difficulties and the fact that "the system is operational and most of the administrative work at Headquarters is already based on it" (see para. 16 of the report). Furthermore, the Advisory Committee welcomes the increase in the number of users of IMIS: between 1 April and 30 September 1996, more than 1,100 staff members used IMIS, the number of transactions in the system has doubled since 1 April 1996 and the average number of users per day now exceeds 400.

6. As can be seen from paragraphs 20 to 22 of the report, the implementation difficulties relating to Release 3 are a result, in part, of data conversion errors, which, in turn, result from the need to maintain in-parallel some elements of the existing systems until the entire IMIS system has been deployed at all duty stations. The data conversion is done through a complex system of 19 bridges and interfaces between IMIS and the existing systems. The Advisory Committee understands that not only is it extremely difficult to achieve a complete synchronization between the two systems, it is also highly labour intensive.

7. Information contained in paragraphs 30 to 32 of the report illustrates difficulties associated with the need to maintain bridges and interfaces with the existing systems; as can be seen, significant amounts of time and efforts are being spent on developing and maintaining a very elaborate system of interaction between IMIS and existing administrative systems, although the progress in this area, in the view of the Advisory Committee, is still not adequate. The Advisory Committee recalls in this connection that the Board of Auditors,[1] for example, pointed to the slow progress in the establishment of a unified management information system for procurement on the basis of the IMIS and the upgraded Reality System and recommended that prompt action be taken to resolve the deficiencies in the Reality System so as to generate comprehensive management information. The Advisory Committee shares the view and recommendation of the Board of Auditors.

8. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee points out that attention to the problems and difficulties resulting from the need to maintain bridges and interfaces with the existing systems should not adversely affect the progress on the development and installation of IMIS. The Advisory Committee believes that an expeditious implementation of the IMIS project should enhance operational efficiency by reducing dependence on the existing systems and eliminating the need to maintain bridges and interfaces. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon request, that it is the intention of the Secretariat gradually to eliminate the bridges and interfaces by the end of 1997.

9. The Advisory Committee welcomes the implementation of Release 1, human resources, of IMIS at the United Nations Office at Vienna and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, as well as the plans to complete installation at all duty stations by mid-1997.

10. In paragraphs 49 to 52 of the report (A/C.5/51/23), the Secretary-General provides information on training in IMIS operations. In the course of the Advisory Committee's consideration of this issue, it became clear and the representatives of the Secretary-General acknowledged that there is a need to strengthen and improve training of staff who hold managerial positions; the Advisory Committee recommends that this be done expeditiously. The Advisory Committee welcomes the plans to incorporate training in IMIS into the Training Programme in United Nations Administration conducted by the Office of Human Resources Management (see para. 52 of the report). Related to training of users and managers is the question of user support. In this connection, the Advisory Committee requests the Secretary-General to evaluate the effectiveness of its current training programmes and to establish a feedback mechanism by which users are able to communicate regularly with management concerning application problems that are being encountered. There should therefore be an adequate capacity to respond to queries and to provide assistance requested by users.

11. Section VIII of the report deals with the issue of utilization of IMIS by other organizations of the United Nations system and peacekeeping operations; as stated in paragraph 59, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) "are already using the human resources applications" of the system, while the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) plan to implement them during 1997. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is installing IMIS for evaluation, while the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) are also interested in the project.

12. The Advisory Committee was informed, during its consideration of a UNICEF report on the revised integrated budget for the biennium 1996-1997, that UNICEF plans to develop an integrated financial system for use at headquarters. The Advisory Committee was further informed that the Fund is examining the feasibility of modifying IMIS or contracting for an external vendor to develop an integrated financial system for UNICEF. It was pointed out to the Advisory Committee that preliminary estimates developed by a consulting firm indicate that it would not be cost effective to modify IMIS. The Advisory Committee expresses serious concern at the tendency of United Nations entities and funds and programmes, particularly those at the same location, to develop incompatible

systems, often without coordination amongst themselves. The Advisory Committee points out that Member States have invested heavily in IMIS and UNICEF must fully justify any proposal to develop its own system. In this connection, the Advisory Committee is yet to be provided with justifications that there are insurmountable technical or cost problems for UNICEF to use IMIS for its new integrated financial system at headquarters. Furthermore, it appears from paragraph 57 of the report of the Secretary-General that there are significant opportunities for the United Nations system to exploit the potential advantages of the IMIS systems at "regional operation centres common to all organizations". The Advisory Committee recommends that the Secretary-General exercise greater efforts to coordinate with all organizations, agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system a broader and more extensive use of IMIS applications, with a view to realizing long-term economies in the development, utilization and maintenance of computer-based information systems that adhere to common standards.

13. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraphs 53 to 58 of the report, which deal with long-term maintenance of IMIS, that discussions are taking place with ILO, UNDP, UNHCR and UNICEF to determine the most efficient and economical way to maintain a common system. The Advisory Committee recalls that in his seventh progress report on IMIS (A/C.5/50/35), the Secretary-General had indicated that it would be feasible to ensure an adequate level of maintenance of the system by providing the maintenance unit with 37 staff. The Advisory Committee was provided, upon request, with information on the initial composition (35 staff) of the maintenance unit, reproduced as the annex to the present report. The Advisory Committee trusts that as a result of the ongoing discussions with ILO, UNDP, UNHCR and UNICEF on the most efficient and economical way of maintenance of the system, every effort will be made to identify, through redeployment, the full complement of staff resources to maintain the system, before proposals are made to request conversion of the current temporary positions to established posts. The Advisory Committee requests that the next progress report on IMIS indicate clearly the contribution to the maintenance of the system by all users of IMIS. In this connection, the Advisory Committee trusts that the concept of regional operation centres and the role of all IMIS users in the financing of the centres will be elaborated in detail.

14. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 66 of the report (A/C.5/51/23) that concerns are growing with regard to the weaknesses of the technical infrastructure, which already occasionally affect the operations of IMIS at Headquarters and may slow down the growth in the usage of the system at offices away from Headquarters; furthermore, the Advisory Committee notes that the Electronic Services Division is working on a plan to upgrade, during the next biennium, the technical infrastructure of the Organization. In this connection, the Advisory Committee recalls its observation in paragraph VIII.30 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 that "much remains to be done in the area of coordination of technological innovations efforts at Headquarters and at its regional offices; there is a need to standardize further electronic equipment and software installed in the United Nations, and to increase the effectiveness and role of the Technological Innovations Board in developing strategy for technological innovations".[2] The Advisory Committee trusts that its above observation will be taken fully into

account by the Secretariat when developing plans for upgrading the technical infrastructure of the Organization.

15. In paragraph 69 of his report (A/C.5/51/23), the Secretary-General, while pointing to a number of reviews of the IMIS project conducted both by the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the Board of Auditors, indicated that "scepticism, however, still prevails within the United Nations in spite of the achievements already attained". In this regard the Advisory Committee points out that the reviews of IMIS do not necessarily reflect scepticism by Member States vis-à-vis the project, but reflect rather a lack of information regarding administrative and budgetary aspects of the project. As reflected in paragraph 2 above, the eighth progress report does not contain any such information either. In this connection, the Advisory Committee recalls that with the recent introduction of Release 3 of IMIS, it requested the Board of Auditors to conduct an updated special audit of the whole project, including cumulative and projected costs, long-term maintenance and client support, with a view to reporting its findings to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

16. Subject to the above observations, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the eighth progress report on the IMIS project.

Notes

[1] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 5 (A/51/5), vol. I, chap. II, paras. 85-89.

[2] Ibid., Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/50/7).

ANNEX

Staff functions provided for the Integrated Management Information System project

Initial composition of the maintenance team*

Level	Function
Management [5]	
D-1	Chief, project
P-3	Administrative officer
GS	Support
GS	Support
GS	Support
Programming [19]	
P-5	Human resource coordinator
P-5	Budget/finance coordinator
P-5	Support services coordinator
P-5	Chief systems analysis/programming
P-4	Systems analyst
P-4	Systems analyst
P-4	Systems analyst
P-4	Systems analyst/programmer
P-4	Programmer
P-4	Programmer
P-3	Systems analyst
P-3	Systems analyst
P-3	Systems analyst/programmer
P-3	Systems analyst/programmer
P-3	Programmer
P-3	Programmer
P-3	Programmer
P-2	Programmer/analyst
P-2	Programmer/analyst
Technical [11]	
P-5	Chief, technical support
P-4	Technical support/table maintenance
P-3	Configuration management
P-3	Database administration
P-3	Technical support/UNIX/SYB
P-3	Technical support/reports
P-3	Programmer/reports
P-2	Help desk support
GS (Other level)	Reports
GS (Other level)	Reports
GS (Other level)	Local area network (LAN) administration support

* All staff are funded from general temporary assistance or on loan from within the Department of Administration and Management. For further details, see the sixth and seventh progress reports of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/48/12/Add.1 and A/C.5/50/35).